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**PASTERNAK AND FAST:
TWO SIDES OF THE IRON CURTAIN**

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PASTERNAK AND FAST: TWO SIDES OF THE IRON CURTAIN

Freedom of expression cannot be qualified. It is either a whole thing or a travesty of truth. For years the Western world has been saying that in the USSR there is no such thing as freedom of any kind. For the same length of time the Communists have been saying that these allegations are capitalistic lies. Now comes Pasternak and his Dr. Zhivago to prove that the West has been right and the Communists wrong. In one of the hottest controversies of the Cold War, the Soviets have attacked the Russian poet and author, winner of the Nobel Prize, with a furious campaign of insults and threats. They have shown the world that freedom of thought and intellectual integrity will not be tolerated in the Soviet state, that not even one voice can be permitted to express an opinion which differs from the official line enunciated by the regime.

The Communists say the West is ruled by ruthless exploiters and oppressors, but previous winners of the Nobel Prize for literature such as Albert Camus (1957) and Francois Mauriac (1952) of France and Sinclair Lewis (1930) and William Faulkner (1949) of the US have criticized severely their societies. They have not had their books refused publication or incurred the insults, threats, and economic discrimination which are the lot of Boris Pasternak.

A striking contrast is the treatment accorded Pasternak and Howard Fast, recipient of the Stalin Prize for Peace in 1953. Although it must be noted that the analogy is not perfect since the Soviet award does not have the lustre of the world-respected Nobel Prize. Fast was for many years associated with leftist political movements, a Communist sympathizer, and for almost a decade and a half, a member of the Communist Party. He was awarded the Stalin Prize for "helping to strengthen the cause of peace between the peoples" according to Moscow Radio. Although Fast was a controversial figure and a writer whose interpretations of American history included much that was critical of Western social and political institutions, there was no widespread protest at his acceptance of the award. The New York Times, reporting the event (21 December 1953), described him in the following terms: "Mr. Fast, 39 years

old, is the author of 12 books, the most widely known being several dealing with the American Revolution and Thomas Paine. His books have been translated into as many as 18 languages and it is estimated that the world publication of all his books totals at least 20,000,000 copies."

Fast himself, in a recent interview broadcast to the Soviet Union by Radio Liberation, stated that he had received considerable criticism in the US when he was given the Stalin Prize. "But", he said "the response to the award in the US press was very dignified and respectful. They were by no means overjoyed by it. But on the other hand, neither did they attack me with abuse, slander, or anything like the incredible display of plain bad taste and bad manners in which Pravda and the Literary Gazette poured on Boris Pasternak."

Commenting on the degrading treatment of Pasternak, Fast said, "It's the most shocking and terrible thing of its kind that we have ever been treated to....We have witnessed the filthy slanders directed against him, the evil threats, the dirty names that he was called--the whole exhibition of degenerate boorishness on the part of the paid and directed Soviet critics."

Such criticism as Fast received in the West did not cause him to repudiate the Prize nor did it interfere with his career as an author. He has continued to write and has had eight books published in the US since 1953 in addition to reprints of his earlier works. Critics, in fact, while admitting that his political affiliations cannot be ignored ("It has become increasingly difficult to arrive at a dispassionate judgement of Fast's work as a writer," Twentieth Century Authors, 1955) have praised his lively interpretations of history and narrative skill.

In addition, Fast remained free to follow his political convictions. He continued his left wing activity and writing until he renounced the Communist Party in 1957. A regular contributor to the Communist Daily Worker, he wrote a series of articles supporting the Soviet campaign against cosmopolites, the Soviet term for Jewish intellectuals, and condemning psychoanalysis and certain writers such as James T. Farrell.

The story of Boris Pasternak is a sad contrast. The announcement that Pasternak had won the 1958 Nobel Prize for Literature was made on 23 October by the Swedish Academy which makes the annual choice. The awards, set up under the will of Alfred Nobel, Swedish inventor of dynamite, are given for excellence in various fields, including literature, science, medicine and services to the cause of peace. They are considered the top award in these fields and the roster of winners is starred with illustrious names. The prize had never been refused, although during the period of Nazi totalitarianism in Germany, several winners were prevented by the Nazi Government from accepting it. Carl von Ossietzki, well-known pacifist, who was in a concentration camp when he was chosen for the award for Peace in 1935, was so prevented as were Richard Kuhn (Chemistry, 1938), A. Butenandt (Chemistry, 1939), and Gerhardt Domagk (Medicine and Physiology, 1939).

The Academy's citation of Pasternak was "for his important achievement both in contemporary lyrical poetry and in the field of the great Russian epic tradition." Dr. Anders Osterling, permanent secretary of the Academy paid tribute to Pasternak's work in a broadcast in which he said, "It is indeed a great achievement to have been able to complete under difficult circumstances a work of such dignity, high above all political party frontiers and rather anti-political in its entirely humane outlook." Although Dr. Osterling mentioned Pasternak's poetic works, My Sister Life (1922) and Themes and Variations (1923), it was clear that his recent novel, Dr. Zhivago, was the major consideration in the choice.

The Academy notified Pasternak by cable; similar notification went to the Soviet Embassy in Stockholm. The first reaction on the part of Pasternak was one of joy. On Saturday 25 October, he cabled the Academy, "Immensely thankful, touched, proud, astonished, abashed." The

reaction of official Moscow was an ominous silence. That the announcement should cause embarrassment to the Soviet hierarchy is not difficult to understand: Dr. Zhivago has not been published in the Soviet Union.

This curious situation whereby a book which has received widespread critical and popular acclaim in both Western Europe and America, while it remains unknown and unpublished in its author's homeland, is itself an indication of the stringent controls imposed by the Soviet rulers on every facet of the national life. The story of its publication charts the thaws and freezes that have marked Soviet policy since the death of Stalin. For almost 20 years Pasternak, once a leading figure in the Russian literary world, had published nothing. Then in 1954, in the period of relaxed control following Stalin's death, 10 poems, described as "poems from the novel in prose, Dr. Zhivago," appeared in the magazine Znamya issued by the Soviet Union of Writers. Having worked on the novel for 10 years, Pasternak completed it in 1954 and submitted the manuscript to the State Publishing House. According to an interview given to the Italian Communist newspaper, L'Unita, by Alexeyi Surkov, Secretary of the Union of Writers in the USSR, poet, prominent literary bureaucrat, and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, it was read by the "whole collective," probably the firm's editorial board. While expressing doubts about portions which appeared to be critical of the Revolution, they accepted the manuscript and scheduled publication for 1956. At this point, Pasternak arranged for the book's simultaneous publication in Italy. He sold the foreign rights to Giancarlo Feltrinelli, a Milan publisher.

Meanwhile, the brief period of relaxed control ended; Soviet discipline tightened. The authorities instructed Pasternak to write Signor Feltrinelli to withhold publication and return the manuscript for revision. Signor Feltrinelli refused. The book appeared in Italy in November 1957 and in the US in September 1958.

It was an immediate success. The book is now in its seventh printing and has appeared in a dozen countries. Critics hailed its scope and philosophical approach, placing it in the tradition of Tolstoy's tremendous account of the Napoleonic period, War and Peace. Marc Slonim in the New York Times Book Review wrote, "Boris Pasternak's book (is) one of the most significant of our time and a literary event of the first order." "A truly great novel," said Bertram Wolfe in the New York Herald Tribune. Edward Crankshaw, writing in the London Observer, calls it a "great novel.... this greatest achievement of the Russian spirit for half a century."

In the USSR the reaction was different. Soviet Minister of Culture Nikolai A. Mikhailov, speaking on a television broadcast in Stockholm in September, gave the official justification for refusing the work. "Our publishing houses publish literature that helps to build a new world, a new society which we call the Communist society," he said, "if the work is written on a plane that is not useful for our society,...why should we publish anything of that nature?"

The announcement of the award was received by Moscow in silence, followed by a furious outburst of insults and threats. On 25 October, Literaturnaya Gazeta, the leading Soviet literary journal, described it as a hostile political act, saying that the Swedes, tools of international reaction, were fanning the cold war against the Soviet Union and the Soviet regime. Pasternak, it declared, "did not march with those who are building Communism. He chose the path of shame and ignominy. He preferred to side with those who are trying to bar the way to Communism." Dr. Zhivago was described as "an artistically squalid, malicious work replete with the hatred of Socialism." Radio Moscow, quoting the review, added, "An ignominious end awaits both Dr. Zhivago, that resurrected Judas, and the author, whose fate will be that of popular disdain."

The following day, Pravda, the official voice of the Soviet Communist Party, joined the attack calling on Pasternak to reject the prize. In an editorial written by a

well-known journalist David Zaslavsky, Pasternak was labelled a "through-and-through bourgeois reactionary,...a malevolent Philistine...an extraneous smudge in our Socialist country." His book was called, "A malicious squib...a lowgrade reactionary hack work...this political slander." Zaslavsky, it is interesting to note, was at one time a right-wing Menshevik and an enemy of the Bolsheviks. He recanted after a term in a Soviet prison nearly 40 years ago. Before his conversion, Lenin wrote, "A universal howl of malice and rage against the Bolsheviks, a dirty campaign by the dirty Messrs. Zaslavskys..." (Pravda, No. 91, July 8 (23 June), 1917, reprinted in Lenin's Works, Vol. 20, p. 561) and again, "Let us not give pleasure to the scoundrels of blackmail--the Milyukovs,...and Zaslavskys..." (Proletari, No. 10, September 6 (August 24) 1917, reprinted in Lenin's Works, 3rd edition, Vol. 21, p. 95). He is recognized now as an old party hack, known for his abusive language in criticizing everything not in accord with the Party line.

On 28 October, the Soviet news agency Tass reported that Pasternak had been expelled from the Soviet Writers Union and deprived of the title of Soviet writer. The decision had been taken by the Presidium of the Soviet Writers Board, the organizational bureau of the Writers Union of the Russian Federative Republic, and the Presidium of the Moscow branch of the Soviet Writers. It was made in view of his "political and moral fall, his treason with regard to the Soviet people, the cause of socialism, peace, and progress paid for by a Nobel Prize in order to intensify the Cold War." Expulsion from the Union suggests that he will be cut off from all connections with Soviet literary agencies, a severe economic penalty.

The stamp of official disapproval was enforced at a rally on 29 October of an estimated 15,000 members of the Young Communist League at the Moscow Sports Palace to celebrate the League's fortieth anniversary. The head of the League, V.E. Semichastny, speaking in the presence of Premier Nikita Khrushchev, compared Pasternak with a pig and added that Pasternak had behaved worse than a pig in that he "dirtied where he ate and he has dirtied those with whom he lives and by whose labor he is living and breathing." Calling him an "internal immigrant," Semichastny went on to ask why he did not emigrate to the "capitalist paradise," and to call the writer "a nasty sheep" and "a man who has spat in our face."

The chorus of vilification, by now hysterical in tone, went on. A meeting of the Moscow section of the Union of Writers petitioned the Government to strip Pasternak of his citizenship as a traitor and to expel him from the country. According to the Soviet press, the petition was adopted unanimously by about 800 writers and critics at the meeting called to consider the Pasternak case. On 1 November Tass issued a statement which said that in the event that Pasternak should wish to leave the Soviet Union permanently, "the Socialist regime and the people he has slandered in his anti-Soviet work, Dr. Zhivago, will not put any obstacles in his way."

Obviously, this agitation was created by order of the Soviet regime. The book is available to the Russian reader only in a pirated edition of 1,200 copies brought out by a Dutch firm last summer and sold at the Brussels World Fair to Russian tourists. Only a tiny percentage of those who have condemned the book could possibly have any first hand acquaintance with it. The 800 "writers and critics" reported to have "unanimously" approved the petition condemning Pasternak were in fact the paid secretaries of local branches of the Union of Soviet Writers. In spite of pressure, such outstanding Soviet writers as Vera Panova, Aleksandr Tvardovskiy and Vladimir Dudintsev refused to sign the petition.

The nature of the campaign against Pasternak has been recognized in the non-Communist world. Protests against the vilification of the writer and his work which caused him to reject the Nobel Prize on 29 October "because of the meaning attributed to the award in the society I live in" have come from many different sources. In England, Bertrand Russell, noted British philosopher and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950, said that "the Soviet authorities have acted very badly indeed." T.S. Eliot, poet and dramatist who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948, headed a group of famous writers who sent a protest message to the Writers Union in Moscow. Signatories included Stephen Spender, Somerset Maugham, E.M. Forster, Graham Greene, Sir Kenneth Clark, Sir Maurice Bowra, J.B. Priestly, Aldous Huxley, Julian Huxley, Rebecca West, Rose Macaulay, Sir Herbert Read and Bertrand Russell. Similar messages were sent by the International P.E.N. (poets, playwrights, editors, essayists, and novelists) and the Society of Authors. The Council of the Royal Society of Literature

sent a telegram to the Union of Soviet Writers appealing to them to restore Pasternak to membership in the union.

In Sweden, the youth organizations of the Conservative, Liberal and Agrarian parties sent messages to Khrushchev saying that the treatment of Pasternak threatened to frustrate all the efforts of the past few years to widen cultural exchanges between Sweden and Russia. The government of Norway announced that it was reconsidering its cultural agreement with Russia because "the case of Pasternak has revealed the Soviet Union and Norway have totally different conceptions of the meaning of the word culture."

Radio Liberation in broadcasts to the Soviet people quoted at length former Nobel Prize winners Pearl Buck, Françoise Mauriac and Albert Camus, and other such notable writers as Archibald MacLeish, Katherine Anne Porter, Taylor Caldwell and William Carlos Williams in protest against the treatment of Pasternak. A public protest signed by 28 Austrian writers urged that all contacts in cultural and scientific fields with the USSR be broken off unless Pasternak were completely rehabilitated as a Soviet citizen and as a writer.

The Italian National Union of Writers telegraphed a protest to the Union of Soviet Writers. In Milan, the National Order of Authors and Writers launched a manifesto calling for an expression "of solidarity with Boris Pasternak today prevented from accepting the Nobel Prize." On 7 November, the Social Democratic Giustizia said that "in the minds of many Socialists and Communists desire for knowledge of facts and of history is making headway. Ideological despotism is the first condition of totalitarianism, the instrument that guarantees its life and survival, as the Pasternak case teaches."

In Panama, the leading daily, La Estrella, said on 14 November that the "Soviet reaction clearly revealed the degree of tyranny and oppression imposed on the intelligence by Red fascism..." From the other side of the world, the Burmese daily Tribune wrote that "only a short time ago Khrushchev stated that there must be peaceful competition between the ideology accepted by Russia and that accepted by other nations. His statement carried little truth if Russia bans a book that expresses criticism...the Russians show that their writers enjoy no freedom and they must produce only what is dictated by the Party."

Protests came from many who had previously expressed sympathy with Communism. Pablo Neruda, one of the world's foremost left-wing poets and perhaps the most revered intellectual among Latin Communists, indicated that he would resign from the Communist Party of Chile because of Russia's treatment of Pasternak. Neruda won the Stalin prize for literature in 1953. Jorge Amado of Brazil, another Stalin prize winner, joined the chorus of protest.

In Morocco, a Rabat newspaper Al Alam, generally uncritical of Soviet policies, said that in the future whatever charges the USSR may bring against the West, "it will never be able to deny its suppression of Pasternak." Ultima Hora, a Brazilian newspaper which has advocated a rapprochement with Moscow, described the incident as "cultural terrorism" and regretted that hopes for greater cultural freedom in the USSR had been disappointed.

In India, Prime Minister Nehru indirectly criticized the Soviet Government's attitude, saying that Pasternak "should be respected" even if he spoke out against "the dominant power" in his novel. In Bombay, a public gathering, including at least one member of the Communist Party, was convened by the All India Centre, the Indian Institute for Educational and Cultural Cooperation, and the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom. Elder statesman C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, presiding over the meeting, said, "No life is worth living and no society could ever maintain itself in a healthy condition unless the greatest possible opportunities are given for the expression of views, however out of fashion they be at that time or however antagonistic to the dogmas and professions of the powers that be." Communist Party member Sudhir Joshi stated, "It is unfortunate that Pasternak is denied the freedom to publish his book in his country." The writers of Kerala, the Indian Communist state, have asked Nehru to invite Pasternak to India. They said that they "believe in the artist's freedom and the right of the intellectual for creative expression and unhindered dissemination of truth."

One other case comes to mind in this connection: that of the poet Ezra Pound. Pound, not only advocated

political and social opinions abhorrent to the society in which he lived, but also actively aided enemy propaganda during wartime. When he was named winner of the Bollingen Prize for Poetry for 1948 he was facing trial for treason against the land of his birth. Despite a flurry of protests, the prize was not withdrawn, nor were his fellow writers later intimidated from working in his behalf. A few months ago the insane poet was released from a mental hospital to the protective custody of his wife.

The Bollingen judges in defense of their controversial award declared that to permit politics to sway their decision "would in principle deny the validity of that objective perception of value on which any civilized society must rest." It is this objective perception of value, the ability of the individual to perceive reality, judge what is good, and act upon his judgment rather than upon the dictates of an artificial system imposed by authority, that is expressed by Boris Pasternak in his novel. For Dr. Zhivago is not a propaganda piece. It is not anti-revolutionary; it is anti-Czarist and it is not pro-capitalist. It does not attack the aims of Communism, but some of its methods.

Although it contains many sharp judgments of the Revolution and the Communist order of things, it is not a political novel in the usual sense of the word. It speaks for intellectual integrity and human freedom. It is this voice which the Soviet regime recognizes as a threat to its very existence which must be combatted with all the fury it can muster. The Soviet regime knows that if one man is permitted to say, as does Dr. Zhivago, "I'm not sure that the end justifies the means. And last--and this is the main thing--when I hear people speak of reshaping life it makes me lose my self-control and I fall into despair," other writers and intellectuals will be encouraged to make individual judgments. As it happened in Hungary and Poland, men will seek and express freedom. It is this that the USSR dare not permit. It is this--in Pasternak's words, "The irresistible power of unarmed truth, the powerful attraction of its example" which the Soviet regime fears.